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Dangers of Synthetic Drugs: “Not in My Navy”

Filed under UNCATEGORIZED

(ONE COMMENT)



Vice Admiral Adam M. Robinson Jr., 36th Surgeon General of the Navy and Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

By Vice Admiral Adam M. Robinson, Jr. Surgeon General of the Navy and Chief of the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

As we enjoy the remainder of this summer season with our friends and family, I'd like to draw attention to a serious health issue affecting our Sailors, Marines, and their families. I'm talking about the dangerous health effects of Spice and other Synthetic Designer Drugs. I would like to take this opportunity to educate and inform all Navy and Marine Corps personnel not only of the potential adverse health effects, but also the legal consequences. It is paramount all Navy Medicine personnel are aware of the adverse effects of these drugs.

Commanding Officers must be fully engaged in synthetic drug abuse prevention and do everything in their power to increase awareness within their commands of the serious health consequences and legal ramifications if caught using, possessing, manufacturing, promoting, or distributing Spice and other synthetic designer drugs.

I hope this will help providers advise their patients, and provide facts and figures that our Military Treatment Facilities should communicate to their personnel in order to provide training, counseling, and increased awareness for all hands.

The Navy's zero tolerance policy for drug abuse includes possession of substances or designated products that contain synthetic cannabinoid compounds, including Spice, fake marijuana or fake pot, herbal incense or potpourri, salvia divinorum, bath salts, Skunk, Genie, Blaze, Dream, Spike 99, Ex-Ses, Spark, Fusion, Dark Knight, Yucatan Fire, K2, and many others. Navy and Marine Corps personnel who wrongfully possess, use, promote, manufacture, or distribute designer drugs or products containing synthetic cannabinoid compounds such as Spice or paraphernalia may be subject to punitive action under Articles 92 and 112a of the UCMJ, adverse administration action, or both.

Consumption of any of these products meets the criteria for drug abuse and is prohibited.

On March 1, 2011, the Drug Enforcement Agency issued a final rule placing five synthetic compounds used to manufacture Spice on the controlled substance list. This action makes

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the wrongful use, possession, distribution, and introduction of these substances unlawful under 112a, UCMJ.

Spice and other Synthetic Drug use such as bath salts, plant food products, and other herbal products is on the rise in our Navy and Marine Corps, are readily available, and falsely marketed by manufacturers as a safe way to get high while avoiding drug detection. Manufacturers constantly change product ingredients and market products under new names. In the past year alone, hundreds of Sailors were held accountable for use or possession of Spice or a Spice derivative. One time use is enough for discharge.

These incidents are not restricted to one type of platform, command, or location either. Most offenders are E-5 and below. Detection through confession of use and reporting of behavior has been the most common. (1st offender caught reports of others’ use within the command.)

Spice looks similar to marijuana or oregano and is used for psychoactive or hallucinogenic effect. The product contains organic leaves coated with chemicals. It is not FDA approved for human consumption, and there is no oversight of the manufacturing process. Unlike marijuana, the synthetic chemicals in Spice-type products are more potent to the brain and other organs because they bind themselves more permanently to receptors. Spice could have multiple unknown chemicals including harmful metal residues, with unknown potency potentially 5-200 times more potent than the THC in marijuana.

Users are also experimenting by combining different products which can dramatically change or increase the effects. Rapid tolerance in some users can lead to increased dosage and addiction, either physical or psychological. According to the DEA, increased use of Spice and other synthetics has led to a surge in emergency room visits and calls to poison control centers.

The signs and symptoms will certainly vary with users. However, typical effects onset within 5-10 minutes include relaxation and sedation, marijuana-like effects such as euphoria, giddiness, bloodshot eyes, impaired short-term memory and concentration. There is also a morning after hangover-like effect. Other more serious signs and symptoms that may durate for 8-10 hours may include internal unrest, tremor, panic attacks, delirium, impaired coordination, sleeplessness, seizures, palpitation, agitation, headache, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Some have even reported paranoid hallucinations, confusion, mood disorders, loss of consciousness, and psychotic symptoms that can last for days or even months in some cases, and can become debilitating.

To deter drug abuse, I urge all Commanding Officers and others in positions of leadership to be fully engaged in their command’s implementation plan to continually communicate and educate all hands as to the Navy’s zero tolerance policy on Spice and other synthetic designer drugs. Each command’s aggressive awareness and education campaign should begin during Indoctrination and be reinforced throughout the year.

We cannot over-communicate this issue. Accountability for those who abuse these substances will help deter their abuse. Given the rise in usage, deterring Spice abuse must be an all hands effort. We all need to look out for each other and our shipmates and report known violations.

Spice represents a real and present danger to our Sailors’ and Marines’ mental and physical health, as well as their military careers. Please help me get the word out to all hands. Navy Medicine will continue to shine a light on this growing concern by delivering sustained, coordinated, aligned and targeted messages to leadership and to the deck plates. Thank you for everything you do and thank you for your service.

For more information on Spice and other designer drugs, please visit:

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